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Policies and Procedures

Title: Cooperative Education Program

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This DIRECTIVE provides ARS policies and procedures on the cooperative education programs for the following students:

- Students in high school diploma programs or undergraduate certificate or diploma programs of not less than one academic year in college-level, technical, trade, vocational and business schools; and
- Students in associate, baccalaureate, graduate, and professional degree-level programs in colleges and universities.

Through a planned schedule of study and related work, a student may be noncompetitively converted to a career-conditional appointment upon successful completion of the program. Employment of cooperative education students is exempt from the full-time-equivalency ceiling.

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1. ABBREVIATIONS

- AAO - Area Administrative Office
- FEHB - Federal Employees' Health Benefits
- FERS - Federal Employees' Retirement System
- FPM - Federal Personnel Manual
- LWOP - Leave Without Pay
- RIF - Reduction In Force
- PD - Personnel Division
- PPSB - Personnel Policy & Systems Branch
- POB - Personnel Operations Branch

2. DEFINITION

Cooperative Education is an education plan which incorporates paid, productive work experience as a regular part of a student's curriculum. It is called "cooperative education" because it is dependent upon the cooperation of organizations outside the college or university to provide the practical experience to form a total education program for the student.

3. AUTHORITIES

- Executive Order 12015
- 5 CFR 213.3202/FPM Chapter 213
- 5 CFR Part 308/FPM Chapter 308
- 5 CFR Part 351/FPM Chapter 351
- 5 CFR Part 410/FPM Chapter 410
- 5 CFR Part 432/FPM Chapter 432
- 5 CFR Part 752/FPM Chapter 752

4. ADVANTAGES OF THE PROGRAM FOR ARS

- Helps to build understanding of ARS job opportunities among students and academia and assists educators seeking employment opportunities for students with the occupational skills needed by ARS.
- Provides talented and motivated students to perform needed work for ARS.

- Supports equal employment opportunity objectives.
- Permits managers to evaluate performance prior to giving an employee a competitive appointment.

5. WORKING AGREEMENTS

Written agreements between ARS and the educational institution are no longer required. However, a working agreement, either written or oral, must be developed with the educational institution that discusses working schedules, program criteria, and requirements for noncompetitive conversion into the competitive service.

For those educational institutions that are required to have cooperative education agreements in writing, a written agreement is provided. See Exhibit 1, Cooperative Education Program Working Agreement.

Prior to establishing a working agreement with an educational institution, contact your servicing personnel specialist to insure that the institution is accredited by an organization recognized by the Secretary of the Department of Education.

6. STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

Students must meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 16 years old.
- Be a U.S. citizen or national (resident of American Samoa or Swains Island). In the absence of qualified citizens, a noncitizen may be eligible provided he or she is:
 - Lawfully admitted to the U.S. as a permanent resident and will be able to meet citizenship requirements prior to conversion; **and**
 - Is a national of an allied country.
- Meet the restrictions on the employment of relatives which permit a student to work in the same agency with a relative only when there is no direct reporting relationship and/or the relative is not in a position to influence or

control a student's appointment, employment, promotion or advancement to a position within the agency.

- Meet security or fitness requirements of the position.
- Be enrolled in an accredited institution's Cooperative Education program, other than by correspondence, in one of the following study programs:
 - Graduate or professional degree program.
 - Baccalaureate degree program.
 - Associate degree program of not less than two academic years.
 - Undergraduate or diploma program of not less than one academic year, that is part of an accredited college-level, technical, trade, vocational, or business school curricula.
 - High school diploma program.
- Be in good academic standing--which is maintenance of at least a 2.0 overall average on a 4.0 scale or the equivalent, a grade "C" or above in a directly-related field of study, and a record that is predictive of graduation.
- Be recommended by an accredited institution.
- Be qualified under the appropriate qualification standard. (Written tests are not required.)
- Be enrolled in a field of study related to the assigned work.

7. APPOINTMENT

Appointments are subject to all laws and policies governing equal employment opportunity. Students will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or political or personal favoritism.

The final selection is the responsibility of ARS.

Students are given excepted conditional appointments under Schedule B (5 CFR 213.3202) authority. They are covered under Tenure Group II in the excepted service and are considered permanent employees. The following appointing authorities are used based on the educational program the student is pursuing:

Baccalaureate Degree	Schedule B 213.3202(a)
Graduate or Professional Degree	Schedule B 213.3202(b)
Associate Degree	Schedule B 213.3202(c)
High School Diploma	Schedule B 213.3202(e)
Undergraduate Certificate or Diploma Program	Schedule B 213.3202(g)

At the time of appointment, students must be briefed regarding their employee benefits, performance requirements and standards and conduct standards expected of a Federal employee. A copy of this DIRECTIVE should be given to the student to ensure that he or she understands the terms of cooperative education employment.

A condition of the original appointment is that the appointment may not extend beyond 120 calendar days after satisfactory completion of the education and study-related work requirements. This is the time period in which a student may be noncompetitively converted to a career or career-conditional appointment and is not counted towards meeting the minimum study-related work hours. If a student is not converted during this 120 calendar day period, he/she must be terminated.

8. QUALIFICATIONS, CLASSIFICATION, AND PAY

Qualifications for student trainee appointment. The Multiseries Student Trainee Qualification Standard for Schedule B Positions should be used to determine qualifications for all non-trade positions. A written test is not required. Student trainees with no previous education or experience may qualify as follows:

Grade	Level of Education
GS-1	Enrollment in a high school diploma program.
GS-2	High school diploma or equivalent.
GS-3	Completion of 1 academic year post-high school study.
GS-4	Completion of 2 academic years post-high school study or an Associate's degree.

- GS-5 Completion of 4 academic years post-high school study leading to a Bachelor's degree or completion of 4 academic years of pre-professional study.
- GS-7 Completion of 1 academic year of graduate level education, bachelor's degree with Superior Academic Achievement, or 5 academic years of pre-professional study.
- GS-9 Completion of 2 academic years of graduate level education or Master's or equivalent graduate degree.
- GS-11 For research, completion of all requirements for a Master's or equivalent degree.

Co-op students with previous related education and experience may be appointed to one of the higher grades listed above in accordance with applicable qualification standards.

The X-118C Handbook, Job Qualification System for Trades and Labor Occupations, should be used to determine qualifications for trade occupations.

Classification. The classification of a position is based on duties, responsibilities and qualifications required for the work. All non-trade student trainee positions, at all levels, should be classified to the xx99 series for the appropriate occupational group.

All positions classified to the student trainee series should be titled Student Trainee followed by a parenthetical title consistent with the occupational field involved, for example Student Trainee (Agricultural Engineering).

Trainees covered by the Federal Wage System should be classified to the xx01 series for the appropriate occupational group.

Pay. Students are paid based on the appropriate grade level and schedule, including holiday and overtime pay.

9. STUDENT BENEFITS

Leave. During work periods, students are subject to the same rules and regulations as other Federal employees in the earning and use of sick leave and annual leave. The student's specific entitlement should be explained at the time of appointment. Unused leave is carried over to the next work period.

Holidays. Students whose work schedules include Federal holidays will be paid for

those days in accordance with their regularly scheduled tour of duty.

Retirement. Students appointed with no prior service or with less than 5 years of prior civilian service are covered by the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS). Any employee excluded from Social Security coverage is also excluded by law for FERS coverage.

Life and Health Insurance. Students whose appointments are scheduled to continue for more than one year and who are expected to be in pay status for at least 1/3 of the total time from date of the first appointment to completion of the program are eligible to elect Federal life insurance (including optional) and Federal health insurance. If enrolled for Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB), students are required when on leave without pay (LWOP) to maintain payments of premiums or have the premiums taken out of regular pay when they return from LWOP. The student would have to cancel his/her FEHB enrollment to avoid responsibility for payment of the premiums.

Tuition Assistance. ARS may use its training authority under FPM Chapter 410 to pay for all or part of the following student expenses: tuition and matriculation fees; library and laboratory services; materials and supplies; purchase of books and other services directly related to training.

Prior to accepting tuition assistance from ARS for training in a non-Government facility, the student is required to sign a written agreement to continue employment with ARS for 3 times the amount of time spent in training. Service in a LWOP status does not count towards meeting this obligation.

Travel and Transportation. If ARS determines that a shortage of qualified candidates exists, a student's travel and transportation expenses may be paid to the first post of duty station. If travel expenses are paid at the time of the initial co-op appointment, they may not be paid again when the student is converted into the competitive service.

10. WORK SCHEDULES

Each work experience must be planned consistent with the student's academic studies and career goals, and be designed to meet the minimum study-related work hours required for conversion; i.e., 1040 work hours for baccalaureate and associate degree students and 640 hours for students enrolled in all other plans of study.

Work schedules may be established as follows:

- Full-time work schedule, alternating with full-time academic classroom study. Alternating students enrolled in associate and baccalaureate degree programs must have at least two full-time work experiences. Students enrolled in all other plans of study must have at least one full-time work experience.
- Part-time work schedule, with parallel periods of classroom study and supervised employment. Part-time students must work a minimum of 16 hours a week with at least a halftime academic course load.
- A combination of both; however, the work schedule may not be intermittent.

Work periods will be scheduled to enable the student to complete the number of required hours and periods of employment necessary for noncompetitive conversion to a career-conditional appointment during the 120 calendar days following completion of educational requirements. There is, however, no guarantee that the student will be converted to a permanent appointment with ARS following graduation.

Students may work the number of hours deemed necessary by the academic institution, the student, and ARS. Work hours should benefit the student's academic progress and should not be used as an employment or placement service.

Summers may be used for one work experience but may not be used for two unless:

- ARS experiences a shortage of qualified candidates; or
- The nature of the occupation is such that the work can only be performed during this time period.

In either case, it must be permissible under a qualifying educational institution's Co-op policy.

11. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- Co-op students' work performance will be evaluated in accordance with DIRECTIVE 418.3, ARS Performance Appraisal System. In addition to providing progress reports, performance appraisals may serve as a basis for

decisions on ratings, retention, promotions, awards, or separation. A student must have a Fully Successful or higher summary performance rating and continue to meet academic standards to remain in the Co-op program. Performance appraisals should be completed following each work period or at a minimum of once a year.

- Co-op students may be promoted to higher-graded trainee positions based on their Federal Government work experience. Time-in-grade restrictions do not apply to Co-op students while they are in the excepted service unless promoting and converting simultaneously. The following are promotion requirements for student trainees:

To GS-2: Continued study in a high school education program and completion of one period of student trainee work experience. Student trainee work experience is the equivalent of 2 months (320 hours) of work experience.

To GS-3: Completion of one full semester, or the equivalent, of post-high school study and one period of student trainee work experience.

To GS-4: Completion of 1 academic year of study and two periods of student trainee experience (640 hours); or completion of 1 1/2 academic years of study and one period of student trainee work experience (320 hours). An academic year of undergraduate education is defined as 30 semester hours, 45 quarter hours, or the equivalent in an accredited college or university, or approximately 36 weeks for at least 20 classroom hours per week in an accredited business, technical, or secretarial school.

To GS-5: Completion of 3 academic years of study and one period of GS-4 student trainee work experience; or completion of 2 1/2 academic years of study and 6 months (960 hours) of GS-4 student trainee work experience.

To GS-7: Completion of 4 academic years of study (or all the requirements for a bachelor's degree) and completion of one period of GS-5 student trainee work experience; or completion of 4 academic years of pre-professional study and completion of one period of GS-5 student trainee work experience.

To GS-9: Completion of 1 full year of graduate level study and completion of one period of GS-7 student trainee work experience; or completion of 5 academic years of pre-professional study and completion of one period of GS-7 student trainee work experience.

To GS-11: Completion of 2 full years of graduate level study and completion of one period of GS-9 student trainee work experience.

- Students may receive performance, superior accomplishment, honorary and other monetary awards based on their contribution to ARS.
- Co-op students are eligible for within-grade (WGI) and quality step increases (QSI). In order to receive a WGI, students must receive a Fully Successful or higher summary rating, have completed the required waiting period, and not have received an equivalent increase during the waiting period. The time a student is in LWOP status may extend the waiting period.

Quality Step Increases are considered as performance awards and may be used to recognize students who have an overall "Outstanding" performance rating.

- Students who fail to meet academic, performance, or conduct standards in ARS should be counseled on the areas needing improvement.
 - If the student fails to improve either performance or conduct and has less than 1 year of current continuous employment (including LWOP), they must be terminated from the program. Students and school administrators must be notified in writing the reason(s) for the termination.
 - If the students' performance is unacceptable and they have 1 year or more current continuous service, they must be given the rights and protections of 5 CFR Part 432. A performance-based action would be required to remove or reduce-in-grade these students for unacceptable performance. In some circumstances, performance actions may be taken under 5 CFR Part 752.
 - If the students' conduct is unacceptable, and they are preference eligibles with more than 1 year of current continuous service or employees with competitive status prior to entering the program, they are entitled to adverse action protections of 5 CFR Part 752 prior to being suspended for more than 14 days, reduced in grade or pay, or removed from the Federal service. Students with unacceptable conduct not meeting this criteria, must be terminated as in (a) above.

12. REDUCTION IN FORCE, TERMINATION, MOVEMENT TO OTHER AGENCIES

Reduction in Force. Students are covered under Tenure Group II for reduction in force (RIF) purposes and have the same retention rights as other excepted service employees. Should a student be separated through a RIF, severance pay may be an entitlement. Students involuntarily separated during the course of their excepted appointment, including the 120 day conversion period, must be released in accordance with reduction in force procedures. The appropriate Nature of Action is 356/Termination-Involuntary.

Termination. Students who are disqualified from continuing in the Cooperative Education Program before completing the educational and work experience requirements must be terminated immediately. The appropriate Nature of Action is 357/Termination. These students may not be reassigned noncompetitively to other positions.

Movement to Other Federal Agencies. Students may move to the Co-op program of another Federal agency, if both agencies agree and the Co-op school concurs.

13. CONVERSION INTO THE COMPETITIVE SERVICE

The Cooperative Education program is designed to provide a source of well-trained employees for career entry into the Federal work force. Every effort should be made to convert students into permanent positions in the same occupations for which they were trained in ARS.

Students are eligible for noncompetitive conversion within the calendar day following completion of educational requirements provided they:

- Complete all educational requirements and work experiences necessary to qualify for a targeted position and a career-conditional appointment;
- Satisfy the following minimum study-related work requirements in a pay status:

Baccalaureate degree	1040 hours (26 weeks)
Graduate or professional degree	640 hours (16 weeks)
Associate degree	1040 hours (26 weeks)
High school diploma	640 hours (16 weeks)

Undergraduate certificate 640 hours (16 weeks)
or diploma level

- Are recommended by ARS; and
- Meet United States citizenship requirements.

Upon conversion, ARS should apply the qualification standards for the occupation under which students received training in the Co-op program. Written tests are not required for conversion.

When simultaneously promoting and converting students from the excepted service into the competitive service, time-in-grade restrictions apply. Co-op students are credited for LWOP time towards meeting time-in-grade requirements. Co-ops may also be placed in career ladder positions without competition. Furthermore, time-after-competitive appointment restrictions do not apply to Co-op students once they have been converted.

The Co-op work experience may be creditable towards completing the required one year probationary period if it was in the same line of work and in the same agency. LWOP time not to exceed 22 workdays may also be counted towards completion of the probationary period.

If converted noncompetitively, Co-op students receive credit for work experience towards their 3-year period for career tenure. In addition, credit must be given for the first 30 calendar days of each LWOP period.

14. PROCEDURE FOR APPOINTMENT

AAO, Division Director, or Staff Chief

- Contact servicing personnel specialist to insure the educational institution is accredited.

Servicing Personnel Specialist

- Insure all program requirements have been met.

LAO, AAO

- Submit the following documents to servicing personnel specialist:

- SF-52;
- Position Description with AD-332 (Although a position description is not required for the targeted position, that position must be identified on the AD-332.);
- SF-171;
- Official Transcript.

Servicing Personnel Specialist

- Notify location when the student may enter on board.

15. PROCEDURE FOR NON-CONVERSION OF CO-OP STUDENT

AAO, Division Director, or Staff Chief

- Notify your servicing personnel specialist as soon as possible after determining that conversion of the student in the current location/organization will not be possible.

Servicing Personnel Specialist

- Inquire as to the geographic availability of the student.
- Explore placement opportunities at other ARS locations. Notify the ARS Coordinator of Cooperative Education if placement in ARS is not possible.

ARS Coordinator for Cooperative Education

- Solicit employment possibilities from other agencies for possible placement of the student.
- If unable to locate employment for the student in another agency, notify servicing personnel specialist.

Servicing Personnel Specialist

- Request an SF-52, Reduction in Force, from the AAO, Division Director or Staff Chief.
- Terminate appointment using reduction in force procedures.

T. J. CLARK

Deputy Administrator

Administrative Management

Exhibits

1 Cooperative Education Program Working Agreement

2 Responsibilities in Federal Co-op

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM WORKING AGREEMENT

between

Agricultural Research Service

(Education Institution)

This agreement is the basis for developing mutual understanding and respective responsibilities between a Federal agency and qualifying educational institution in the employment of Cooperative Education students. The Co-op program is a planned, progressive educational program that provides for the integration of a student's academic studies and Federal work experience with the potential of noncompetitive conversion into the Federal career service. It is consistent with guidance contained in Federal Personnel Manual 308, Subchapter 2, Cooperative Education Program, and the agency's policy.

Included

with this agreement is a description of the general responsibilities of Federal Co-op program participants.

A. Student Eligibility

A prospective Co-op Student must:

1. Be at least 16 years old;
2. Be a U.S. citizen or national (permanent resident, in absence of qualified citizen);
3. Meet the agency's policy on nepotism;
4. Meet security or fitness requirements;
5. Other:

B. Selection

An Agency may appoint students who:

1. Are enrolled in and recommended by the school's Co-op program;
 2. Are in good academic standing;
 3. Meet qualification standards of the position;
 4. Other:
- must
- study-related

C. Pay and Benefits Information

1. Students are paid in accordance with established pay schedules.

2. Benefits for which students may be eligible include:

- Retirement
- Life and Health Insurance
- Vacation, Sick, and Holiday Leave
- Tuition Assistance
- Travel and Transportation Payment

3. Other:

D. Work Schedules

1. Each work experience be planned consistent with the student's academic studies or career goals and be designed to meet the minimum

work hours required for conversion.

2. Schedules may be:

A Co-op Student is appointed on a Schedule B 213.3202 appointment which may not extend beyond 120 calendar days after satisfactory completion of educational and study-related work requirements.

- Full-time or Alternating
- Part-time or Parallel
- Combination of Both

3. Part-time students must work a minimum of about 16 hours per week with at least a ½ time academic courseload.
4. Alternating students are educational required to have two work experiences.
5. Work schedules may not be confined to summer or vacation periods exclusively, unless covered under exceptions in FPM 308 (S2).
6. Students may work up to 2600 work hours in a 2-year period. (Revised 11/13/90)
7. Other:

citizenship

E. Performance Appraisal

1. Performance appraisals are required for Co-op students program consistent with the agency's appraisal system. Results should be shared with schools.
2. If a student's performance falls below Fully Successful, he/she may be given an opportunity to improve or will be separated from the program.
3. Other:

F. Employment After Completion of Co-op Program Requirements

1. Within 120 calendar days after completing requirements, the employing agency may non-competitively convert a student to a career or career-conditional appointment.
2. Students must have satisfactorily completed study-related work hour requirements of the Federal Co-op program -- that is 1040 work hours for baccalaureate and associate degree students and 640 work hours for all other Co-op students.
3. Students must meet and employment of relatives requirements by the date of conversion.
4. Trainees disqualified from continuing in the Co-op or not converted must be terminated.

Full consideration will be given to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or political or personal favoritism.

For Educational Institution:

For Agricultural Research Service

Signature

Signature

Title

Title

EXHIBIT 2
RESPONSIBILITIES-IN-FEDERAL-CO-OP

The Federal Agency Role

The School's Role

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Designate a staff member to maintain liaison with the

qualifying educational institution; | 1. Designate representative to work
with the Federal Agency Co-op

Program Manager; |
| 2. Inform school of work experience opportunities and provide adequate job descriptions promptly; | 2. Inform eligible students of Federal Cooperative Education opportunities, identifying potential employers; |
| 3. Establish work schedules consistent with the school's

academic calendar that enable

students to complete the Co-op program; | 3. Refer interested and qualified candidates to agencies without discrimination, including veterans discharged under honorable conditions; |
| 4. Orient the student to agency's mission, policies and procedures; | 4. Correlate work and study in a manner that will expand the student's educational development; |
| 5. Select appointees referred by schools in accordance with EEO principles; | 5. Furnish the agency with requested information related to student's field of study and academic standing; |
| 6. Process all personnel actions and keep necessary records related to student employment; | 6. Monitor academic progress; |
| 7. Provide quality work assignments related to the student's academic | 7. Inform the Federal agency of any change in a Co-op student's status, |

studies or career goals where they can learn and be productive. Provide progressive and diversified Co-op experiences to prepare students for occupations in which they have an interest;

including reports on a student's progress and performance;

8. Conduct appraisals and counsel students regarding their performance; complete necessary forms, and share progress reports with schools;
9. Notify schools of any change in a Co-op student's status;

The-Student's-Role

1. Adhere to the agency's work schedule and Co-op policies and procedures.
2. Assume personal and professional responsibilities for actions and activities;
3. Use a courteous, enthusiastic, and professional approach to policies and procedures within the occupation and organization;
4. Meet academic, performance, and conduct standards set forth by the school and Federal agency;
5. Provide the agency and school Co-op coordinators with periodic progress reports on the quality of work and study assignments;
6. Work effectively with peers and supervisors;

7. Notify the school or Federal agency of changes in your status;
8. If a noncitizen, to meet citizenship requirements prior to eligibility for conversion into the Federal career service.